THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
LIBRARY EXTENSION PUBLICATION
VOL. II JULY, 1936 NO. 6

MODERN PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS

CARO MAE GREEN RUSSELL

With Some Notes on the Theater and the Screen
by
PAUL GREEN

CHAPEL HILL MCMXXXVI
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS

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1936

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Published six times a year, October, January, April, May, June, and July by the University of North Carolina Press. Entered as second-class matter February 5, 1926, under the act of August 24, 1912. Chapel Hill, N. C.

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THE THEATRE AND THE SCREEN

Many years ago I stood with my father in a side-show and saw a miracle happen on a screen. A little man in a top hat was shown diving from a high platform into a swimming pool and then springing back out of the water and onto his perch again. The tent that day was crowded with farmers and their wives and children who had come to see the sword-swallower and the wild man from Borneo. But when for the last act this jerky little figure came walking along the side of the tent wall, made his manikin bow to us—the audience—and then went twirling down from his high perch into the water, and zoop! back again the way he'd come, we thought no more of smoking knives or bloody meat. That night the farmers, their wives and children, all on the roads that led home like lengthening spokes from the bright city, were talking of this wonder.

"But the thing moved like a real man, Mommee."

"So it did move. It was a man."

"How did they make it move like that?"

"You tell him, George."

"How did they Poppee?"

"Edison and such fellows can do anything these days."

"But he dived somersaults backwards and up in the air I bet twenty feet. A man can't really do that, can he, Poppee?"

"Go to sleep, Marvin."

* * * *

In 1915 *The Birth of a Nation* came to our capital city. The newspapers and wayside signs worked up a lot of interest in our section, and I rode off to see it. After a trip of several hours which covered thirty-five miles of miry road, I arrived at the crowded theatre door and finally made my way inside and up into the balcony. Every seat in the house was taken. The lights went down, the orchestra began to play, and things started to happen. It would be hard to describe the effect of the picture on the audience that day. There on the screen in front of our eyes not more than twenty yards away we saw brave armies fighting as only brave ones can. We heard the roar of cannon, the neighing of horses, saw the bleeding and the dying, the fluttering flags and banners. And all the while the thunder and beat of the orchestra whipped our souls

along in the story. Now like a breath the tumult is gone, the rumble and cannonading die out and a beautiful woodland vision entrances us. There stands the handsome Little Colonel and his exquisite southern sweetheart, dove in hand and all, saying a fond farewell, and the music of the violin proclaims the piteousness of their love. Then with a flick the scene has changed again, and we see the dark and sliding figure of the villain prowling around a vine-clad cottage, and the evil of his nature is intensified for us in the croompy notes of the bassoons.

So the story went on unfolding, in dumb show and musical sound, the hopes, the loves, and the dangers that beset these our heroic characters. The audience sat one moment in breathless anxiety, another moment they were applauding the short triumph of virtue and honor. And when at last the robed and wind-blown figure of the Klansman on his horse stood in a medium close-up on a hill, and the bugle in the orchestra announced with its high note that a stern and powerful force was risen to defend the innocent ones from all villains of whatsoever creed or color, a frenzy ran among the spectators like fire among broomstraw. There were yells and shouts, clenching of fists, and loud unashamed oaths. One woman directly in front of me sprang up as in a religious hysteria and screamed, "Kill 'em, kill 'em!" and then like a lady in a play fell with a fainting thud to the floor. One of the ushers hurried up and carried her out, but even as he went he kept looking back towards the screen. Not until years later did I realize that without the bugle note the lady would not have fainted.

I saw *The Birth of a Nation* many times, and its effect on the audience was always much the same. True, these audiences were southern, and this would account for some of the emotional outbursts on racial matters, but from general reports this film was a great success in all parts of the world. (I should like to mention here that of all the modern stage plays I have witnessed or heard about none of them seem to have affected the audience to the degree that this tragic and romantic story did.)

The next event in the movies for me was Charlie Chaplin. One day in 1919 his *Shoulder Arms* was shown in a French cantonment for us American soldiers. Here again the audience was moved to vent its loud appreciation. Chuckles and gales of laughter swept through the hall at the antics of the little man, and for a while

the memory of air raids, whining 75's, snipers, stink and filth was forgotten. He was the divine magician playing with the bauble of our souls for an hour. And some weeks later, when I saw the likeness of Charlot hauled through the streets of Paris and followed by a great crowd of hurrahing boys and girls, I joined in the procession which led to a moving-picture entrance. And from that day to this I have followed wherever he leads. A few years ago I sat with a friend who, like me, was seeing "The Gold Rush" for the tenth time. After the show we spoke in guilty defense of Shakespeare and the drama and felt sad that neither of us would wish to see one of those plays ten times. But the afterthought that we had read most of Shakespeare's plays more than ten times and would continue to read them comforted us where thoughts of the stage could not.

Who would try to explain Chaplin's great appeal to the world—an appeal that would doubtless be lost in a medium other than the movies? But I should like to observe in passing that so far as I know no actor in the theatre has ever been so generally effigied, honored and adored. Even his shoes and cane and every bit of costume are destined to some sort of immortality somehow and somewhere. He is the first great genius of the film. His creations as actor, scenarist and director outweigh all that has been done either by the beauties and bores of Hollywood or by Griffith, Eisenstein, Pabst, Pudovkin or Clair. And when this is said the inspired work of the great German actor, Emil Jannings, and our own Walt Disney is not forgot. Chaplin is the pioneer pointing the way and has already provided us with the technique for future progress.

* * * *

Some time ago I had the chance to do some movie writing in Hollywood. With all the glaring evidence of cheap pictures that fill the world before me, and with plenty of warnings against Babylon and all its waste and iniquities, I landed at one of the major studios. This at last was the glittering world of Pirandellian make-believe, where everything seems what it is not and yet is what it seems. Here were hundreds of acres of buildings where dreams were manufactured, where thousands of people went in and out early and late creating millions of feet of film on which were imprinted little shadows that acted, talked and danced and spun their thousand and one tales of ambition, love or despair.

The first thing to do was to see inside and get acquainted with the goings-on. And so I did, and tried to understand what I saw. I read all the books on the movies I could get—both European and American. I poked about in the cutting rooms, the wardrobes, the projection rooms and construction departments. I read the engineers' handbooks on light and sound devices. I made myself familiar with all the camera terms from "angle-shot" to "wipe-off." And the more I learned the more enthusiastic I became. Here indeed, was the creation of the machine age which was the equal of the Word as spoken by men of old. Here was a medium infinite and universal in its power, able to depict anything—whether in heaven, or earth, or in hell; whether of man's relation to man or man's deepest unconscious self. For the first time in history a completely democratic art form was available, capable of answering any demand made upon it by the imagination of any human being. For the first time in the history of the world we had a medium in the movies which could be understood by black and white, yellow or red, the only requirement being that the audience must be able to see or hear—better if it could do both. For pantomime is understood by all men of whatever race, creed or calling, and music likewise. A Japanese will laugh at Charlie Chaplin even as a New Yorker will.

For several weeks I labored on a script, trying to measure up in some degree to the camera which was to express the story I had to tell. No one hurried me, nobody said do this or that. Apparently I was left free to do as I chose. What was this nonsense I had heard about the cramping power of Hollywood and its slave-driving methods with writers? I began to doubt the tales of woe which brethren of my kind had been wont to tell. At last my script was in some sort of final shape, and conferences with producer, director, leading actor and men of the technical staff began. The scenario was read, discussed and tentatively accepted. I was pleased to find that the boss men said only a little revision was needed here and there and the thing would be ready for shooting. The revisions suggested seemed sensible enough, and I gladly tried to make them. So the script was finally delivered into the producer's hands, and I began another job while it was being shot. Now and then I would hear a report from the lot that "everything was going fine," and I was beginning to feel some pride in the fact that this picture

was to be a little better maybe than the general Hollywood product. A few times I went on the set and watched the making and came away with nothing but admiration for the studio and its employees. How hard and seriously everybody seemed to be working—from early morning till late at night they labored. And as time went on I learned that contrary to general report, hard work was the rule in Hollywood. Nervous breakdowns there are not all liquor and libidos.

When the picture was finally completed, I went downtown to see it. It turned out to be a straight-forward, level and unimpressive thing. Whatever touch of inspiration I thought I had in writing it was gone. On referring back to my script, I found a bit here, a bit there, this end of a scene, this key line of a scene changed or left out. Somebody had been there while I was gone. I discussed the matter some days later with another writer—a man who formerly had been a pretty well known novelist and now was an ace scenario writer with at least one Rolls-Royce and a seaplane to his credit. "Yes," he said, "they gave your script to me to look over. I hope you didn't mind. We often have to do that."

"Do what?" I asked.

"Well, smooth things up. You see, your script leaned too much toward one of these cussed artistic productions, and that's a thing no studio will allow. There's not a cent of money in them."

"How do you know there's not?"

"Listen, this is a business out here, not an art, you'd better go back to Greenwich Village or South Carolina."

"North Carolina," I corrected with some heat.

"Well, wherever it is."

"But Chaplin"—I began.

"Yes, Chaplin!" he snapped.

* * * *

My friend was right, as I well found out. Making pictures in Hollywood is a business, an industry, and with its present aims and methods has to be. This simple and first fact is the source of all the trouble that befalls any one interested in the art of the cinema, whether he be actor, writer, musician, architect, dancer, sculptor, painter or stage designer. Since the old nickelodeon days when this novel form of mass entertainment tapped a mine of riches for any hustling Tom, Dick or Abie, money-making has been its

prime aim. And this being true, it was logical that as the different studios developed they should follow the methods of big business and in the competitive market force a speeding up and leveling out of production that prohibits any sort of experimentation or excursions into new creations. The only experimentation they can or will afford to be interested in is that of novelty. Let any new trick or gadget be invented which might be used to intrigue the populace through the till, and the executive will grab it in an instant. But let an Eisenstein or Jannings try to interest them in cinematic art and they politely but firmly refuse to hear. "We'd like to do fine things," they will always tell you, "but such pictures never pay. We'll show you the books."

The studios have a product to sell to the masses of the world, and in order to sell to everybody they think they must strike a common denominator of general illiteracy and bad taste. Perhaps they must. Their pictures are standardized by what they consider to be the intelligence quotient of the majority of people in the small villages and cross-road places. For there are many times more 14-year-old minds in the world than 20-year-old minds. And a dime is a dime no matter whose it is, and the best picture from the Hollywood point of view is the picture that attracts the most dimes. This is obvious and well known to everybody, but I mention it in order to somewhat explain, for instance, that pernicious institution known as censorship. That powerful organization is in actuality no other than a liaison body between the studios and the public. Outwardly it has as its intent the welfare of the country's morals. But what the organization really does is to keep the studios informed as to the varying whims of the 14-year-old mind and what is likely to go best in Ohio and not to go in North Carolina.

By censoring each script carefully and reporting its findings to its employer, the producer, the consorship board saves the studios hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in wasted footage. No wonder the producers are willing to provide the salaries of that body, for after all it is one of the best paying parts of their business. And so it is that the writer who strives to create a script which in some way shall express the drama of his characters, or the problems of life as he feels them to be, is again and again defeated in his purpose by the censor. And once the censor says nay to a line or a scene, the writer is helpless. The producer simply has

to point to the ruling of that office, if he cares to, and say, "Here's the public board on morality and customs. It says no"—and no it is. Sometimes a producer will overrule the censor, as in the case of a recent sensational convict picture, but these differences of judgment are rare.

Such difficulties as these, to repeat, make it impossible for one interested in the moving pictures as an art to sink himself in Hollywood without some loss in time and energy. He can replenish his purse perhaps, but it is likely to prove a costly gain otherwise. There is hardly any place on the globe so full of unhappy would-be artists—writers, musicians, actors and poets. They are surfeited with hush money, but many of them cannot hush the gnawing that wakes them up at night when they think of the book they had planned to write, the play they yet will write, or the symphony that struggles somewhere within them. They are wearied to distraction trying to provide cheap stuff for actresses who know how to work for the public, and likewise for their illiterate consorts, the actors who know little more.

* * * *

But even so, Hollywood is essentially no worse than the old Broadway theatre, or for that matter the professional entertainment theatre in any great metropolis, a generation ago. In fact it is the old theatre in a new form. The movies through the universality of their medium have been able to provide more entertainment to more people at less cost than the old professional theatre could, and the Erlangers have disappeared. And just as the art or imaginative theatre grew out of a revolt against the professional theatre, so will the art or imaginative cinema grow out of the professional movies. The hundreds of dissatisfied creative minds, whose sole job day after day is the making of money for bankers, millionaires and stockholders, will some day—and very soon at that—break into open revolt. There is no price large enough to keep a rebellious spirit indefinitely enslaved. Already a few independent producers, writers and artists are trying a few forlorn experiments in creating pure forms of cinematic art, both here and abroad. And just as the imaginative theatre has had its Appia, its Stanislavsky, and Craig, so will the new imaginative cinema have its apostles and philosophers who, following the lead of Charlie Chaplin, will give to the art a statement of form and method. And when this new art has

broken itself loose from the industry and professionalism of Hollywood and started on its own path, we shall see moving picture dramas worthy of the name. Writers, actors, directors, and musicians will then take joy and pride in their work and will strive to the best of their minds and souls to deal with the camera as its essential nature provides. And what they create will be of their own making, and the writers will be free to write scenarios as full of imagination and poetry as their gifts will allow. And these scenarios will have the dignity of publication, just as stage plays are now published, and the author will have every privilege in the art cinema that his brother playwright has in the art theatre.

* * * *

In the Imaginative Cinema, as I like to call it, which is soon to be a power in the world, this truth will be recognized; namely, that the art of the cinema is not the art of the theatre. And conversely the theatre—(that is—the imaginative theatre, for no other is really left, now that the movies have taken over the professional theatre)—this theatre must realize that its art is not that of the cinema. Each has a nature of its own, and each must interpret man and his world in its own technique. But in each the poet as a creator shall be supreme. In the cinema he has a means of universal and infinite power—the camera. In the theatre he likewise has a means of universal and infinite richness—the intimate presence. In the former he has an invention which eradicates all the material difficulties of depiction which beset the stage, but which projects forth only shadows of two dimensions and begins with a certain aloofness therefor. In the latter he has the embodied being which projects only itself and in three dimensions and begins with a complete and vital closeness therefor. And as the essential nature of the camera is expressed in pantomime and accompanying sound, so the essential nature and the intimate presence is expressed in words and accompanying pantomime.

And in this new cinematic art form we shall some day find the complete expression of genius. And that genius we await. Chaplin is the forerunner of some cinema Shakespeare-to-be. As yet there is no forerunner in the imaginative theatre for the coming apostle of the shining word, but the growing concerted effort of people believing and working in the art theatre throughout the world is

providing the way. And soon, very soon, we shall have on the one hand the art cinema with its triumphant beauty and on the other hand the art theatre with its triumphant beauty; and what the latter may lack in flexible distribution it will make up for in intensity.

Now those who lament the death of the theatre before the onslaught of the movies do not grasp the essential differences of the two mediums and likewise forget the godlike power which resides in the word spoken by the intimate breathing presence. It is immortal and cannot die, and a theatre founded on it will never perish. The theatre is not dead. Only the worst of it is dead or moved elsewhere. Let that worst go with its methods of industry and mass marketing. The best, more purified and certain of itself shall stand, for the very essence of time and the nature of man is that before history is finished the best shall somehow come forth to light.

But this theatre of the imaginative word and intimate presence must refit itself more in terms of the machine age if it is to be free and powerful as it should be. It must take a lesson from the flexibility and universality of the camera medium and make more flexible and universal its own medium. It must throw away the bothersome clogs of too many material props which impede the flow and lift of the dramatist's story. Slight suggestions and symbols should be sufficient. Let the poet follow his story wherever it leads—into bogs, boudoirs or skyscrapers. Let the word speak. With the great advance in discoveries concerning light, almost any change of scenery and scene effect can be worked instantaneously; and when the curtain goes up on the stage the processes of fade-ins, fade-outs and dissolves which the movies have discovered can be used so that the dramatist's imagination and the audience's attention remain one.

* * * *

And under such conditions poetry will return again to the stage, and the freedom that Shakespeare knew in his Elizabethan theatre will be ours with greater enchantment. And whereas the new cinema art form will be the imaginative sight and sound unlimited, so the new theatre will be the home of the imaginative word and vitalized being unbound. And once more, as in the days of Shakespeare, we shall be able to parade before our vision all the manifestations of nature and the subtleties of the mind which are usable in the movie medium. And once more music in the theatre will return

to us, above which the high poet's words are calling. And perhaps as never before the earth with its trees and flowers, the skies with their storms, the darkness of the night, the fear of wandering spirits, the hates, the passions and grandeur and omnipotence of God Himself, shall be evoked and spoken forth.

This the stage must do.

This the camera will do!

—Paul Green

(Reprinted from the *New York Times*)

CHAPTER I

EUGENE O'NEILL, AMERICA'S LEADING DRAMATIST

"We have endured too much from the banality of surfaces."
—O'Neill

"Tall and slender and wiry, with long arms and strong hands; his body as lithe as an athlete's, his smile disarmingly frank and engaging"—thus does Eugene O'Neill appear to one who knows him.

Born in a Broadway hotel in 1888, O'Neill spent most of his childhood and youth in the shadow of the theatre. His father was the famous actor, James O'Neill, friend of Edwin Booth, who said he could play Othello better than himself. His mother had little interest in the theatre but she was a fine pianist.

"My first seven years," says O'Neill, "were spent mainly in the larger towns all over the United States—my mother accompanying my father on his road tours in *Monte Cristo* and repertoire. . ."

When he was eight years old his parents put him in boarding school where he stayed until 1906. That fall he entered Princeton University as a freshman but was suspended before the end of the year because of "general hell-raising." This was the beginning and end of his college career. Three years later he married, but this soon proved a mistake, and he set out on a gold prospecting trip to Central America. After six months of futile "prospecting," he was sent home ill with tropical fever. After recovering, his father gave him a job as assistant manager of his acting company, which was on tour, but after three months he gave that up. The old-style theatre of blood and thunder, sentimentality and pretence, had no appeal for him.

He then set out on another sea voyage—"sixty-five days on a Norwegian barque, Boston to Buenos Aires." While in Buenos Aires he found himself destitute and was compelled to live on the beach picking up whatever he could to sustain himself. Here he came to know his fellow down-and-outs, their attitude toward life and their behavior. "Like Gorky he seems to have found in the lot of the outcast some consoling reality, some satisfactory reading of life," says Barrett H. Clark.

He finally caught a boat home and the following August took a job with the New London *Telegraph* as a reporter. This was his

first writing job. Frederick P. Latimer was his boss, and while others were beginning to look upon young O'Neill as a reckless misfit, Latimer believed in him and helped him. "He was the cub reporter," writes Mr. Latimer to O'Neill's biographer, "and the four things about him that impressed me at once were his modesty, his native gentlemanliness, his wonderful eyes, and his literary style. . ." In December, 1912, however, he was forced to give up this job and go to a sanitarium for treatment for tuberculosis. After a short time he was discharged as an unimportant "case." Of this time O'Neill later said: "At Gaylord (the sanitarium) I really thought about my life for the first time, about past and future." And so it was that Eugene O'Neill decided to become a serious writer. He began to read and study. He even learned German in order to read the plays of Frank Wedekind in the original. He enrolled in Professor Baker's famous "47" playwriting course at Cambridge; and in 1916 went to Provincetown, Massachusetts, where he came to know the members of the recently organized Provincetown Players. They produced his one-act plays, and when they moved to Macdougal Street, New York, they and O'Neill continued to cooperate. While they established O'Neill as a dramatist, he in turn supplied them with fresh plays, the originality and insight of which had not before come from any American playwright.

By 1920, with the production of *Beyond the Horizon* which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, O'Neill had become firmly established as America's most significant dramatist. From this time on his success was rapid. "As his success continues," says one writer, "he grows more reticent and retiring. He is by nature sensitive and nervous, and he speaks haltingly except when in the company of intimate friends. He seldom goes to the theatre . . . and has seen only three of his own plays."

Subjects for Study

1. The Life and Plays of Eugene O'Neill

His inheritance.
He "sows his wild oats" and settles down to serious work.
A passionate observer of life, an uncompromising artist.
His search for new and adequate dramatic forms. His use of the mask
The Great God Brown. Strange Interlude.

His poetic gift not in his speeches but in his conceptions. His growing fondness for "fine writing."
His absolute sincerity and ever increasing complexity as an artist.
His place among other American playwrights.

2. Strange Interlude.

Theme: The critic George Jean Nathan says that O'Neill's aim here is "an elaborate clinical psychological study of his characters and an automatic commentary upon and analysis of them." This precludes a moral, in the accepted sense. Can you link this with post-war preoccupation with psychoanalysis and introspection? Do you feel that the playwright's knowledge of the unconscious is adequate to the use of the form he has chosen?

Characters: The mask is used here only in a metaphorical sense. The "asides" reveal the character behind the mask. Which male character do you consider most successfully done? If it is Marsden can you give a reason for this? Possibly O'Neill found the simplest character, Sam, the most difficult to reveal. Is Sam convincing? Can you explain why the most complex male character is most successfully presented while the simplest is the greatest failure? Does Sam's mother suggest a caricature?

Structure: The established methods of dramatic writing could not meet the author's need here. To dig deep into the unconscious he had to employ a richer medium of expression—the result is a combination of the technique of the novel and of the drama. Observe that he covers twenty-five years of the lives of these people. In what way do these spoken "secret" thoughts and emotions differ from the old soliloquy and asides? Compare the first five acts with the last four. There is a decided drop in vitality and imagination, to the extent, occasionally, of banality. Do you think this could have been intentionally done to show perhaps the gradual aging and deterioration of the characters? Does the content of this play justify its length? Do you ever sense a straining on the part of O'Neill to fit the characters to a pre-conceived arrangement of plot?

3. Desire Under the Elms.

Theme: In this play again O'Neill is not the teacher but the artist. He is presenting the bad as well as the good of these peasant characters with an artist's aloofness. Notice the symbolism. The two elms might represent Puritan repression, as well as help to create a poetic mood. Certain scenes in themselves are comedy, but do they not contribute an integral part to the tragic mood of the play?

Characters: Old Ephraim is a mixture of hard cruelty and superstition. Observe his sensitivity to atmosphere. For example, his speech—"It's cold in this house. It's oneasy. . ." Also his reflections outside the house while the dance is going on. What significance has the frequent references to the stones on the farm? Are the stones symbolic of their lives? What is your judgment of the murder of the baby? Would Abbie not perhaps have murdered Ephraim instead? Of what importance to the drama are Simeon and Peter?

Structure: Notice the skill and subtlety with which O'Neill handles the first scene between Simeon and Peter. Can you recall any other play in which the background of the characters and the problem are brought out with equal naturalness? Where does the unity of the play lie? With Abbie? What is your opinion of the scene in which Abbie and Eben are in their respective rooms in the upstairs of the house? This is not within the realm of possibility, but is it artistically sound theatre? Does Ephraim's character entirely reveal itself before Part III, Scene IV? Read all of Part III.

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CHAPTER II

MAXWELL ANDERSON, POET-DRAMATIST

As water finds its level, so power goes
To him who can use it, and soon or late the name
Of king follows where power is.
—Essex in *Both Your Houses*

"When a man starts peddling personal stuff about himself they should send a squad of strong-arm worms after him, because he's dead," was Maxwell Anderson's reply when questioned about his personal likes and dislikes.

The answer is characteristic. He is not a great talker, especially about himself, has never granted an interview, and honestly believes that all the public should know about him is in his plays. Consequently there is little in print about the man himself.

Anderson's father, a clergyman, was constantly being moved from one pastorate to another. The family was living in Atlantic, Pennsylvania, in 1888 when the son was born, but they soon moved on to Ohio and from there to Iowa. They were living in North Dakota when he was ready for college. Professor Koch had recently launched the Dakota Players at the State University and Anderson entered there as a freshman. He soon found himself writing plays under that teacher's encouraging instruction. After graduating from the University he was a teacher, first in Leland Stanford University and later in Whittier College, California. But he said he needed more money than he could get teaching school and resigned in favor of journalism. The real reason, we suspect, was his love of writing, for in this he is a natural. It is said that he can leave a rehearsal of one of his plays and return in a half hour with pages of new dialogue written absolutely in character. He is a poet of consequence, and issued his first volume of lyrics, *You Who Have Dreams,* in 1925. Since then he has contributed poems regularly to the *New Republic* and other magazines.

Anderson came to New York in 1918 as a member of the staff of the *New Republic.* Later he wrote editorials for the New York *Globe* and when his first play was produced, in 1923, he was on the editorial staff of the late *Morning World.* This play, *White Desert,* ran for only a short while. Anderson later said that he was "much depressed" over its failure, and still thinks it is his best piece. The

critics were generous toward it and predicted that some day its author would write a "great play." The amazing success, a year later, of *What Price Glory,* which he wrote in collaboration with Laurence Stallings, came near to fulfilling this prophecy. This was the first realistic war play ever to have been presented in New York, and it has not yet been surpassed in force and conviction. From this time on Anderson the journalist became Anderson the dramatist.

Other successes followed, notably the family comedy, *Saturday's Children* in 1926, and, while it is not typical of the playwright's manner of writing, it remains one of his most popular pieces. *Elizabeth the Queen,* and *Both Your Houses,* awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1933, will long be remembered by playgoers.

Maxwell Anderson's gifts are varied and profound, and, says Carl Carmer, he has not yet written a play in which all of them are concentrated. His genius for poetic expression is illustrated in *Elizabeth the Queen* and *Night Over Taos,* his earnest indignation against the injustices of the world is stated in *Both Your Houses,* and his intuitive knowledge of human character is demonstrated in all of his plays, but particularly in *Saturday's Children.*

About his understanding of human beings Mr. Carmer says further that "while other dramatists, O'Neill in particular, sometimes make us believe that they have been reading the conclusions of psychoanalysts and then show us believable people who illustrate them, Anderson's characters are singular, each a case-history in himself, not wholly explicable and therefore the more real."

Anderson is now writing scenarios in Hollywood, when he is not at his home in New York, and, says Sidney Skolsky, "he writes motion pictures strictly for the big money that is given to him to do so." Since he cares nothing for the cinema, and never goes to see a picture, this sounds truthful enough. He has a large library at his home and prefers to spend his evenings reading rather than visiting Broadway. He loves to read Shakespeare and this love is detected in his own writings, particularly in the play below selected for study.

Subjects for Study

1. Elizabeth the Queen, an Historical Romance

Theme: The author had the foresight not to try to make this play stick too close to historical fact, but chose to emphasize the struggle

between Queen Elizabeth and Essex, the man she loved. It is the clash of two characters each craving power, and determined to keep it, in Elizabeth's case, and to achieve it, in Essex's. From this determination, complicated by their love for each other, and their strange truthfulness, emerges genuine tragedy. The highest point is reached in the scene between the Queen and Essex just before his execution. In this connection read Essex's speech, page 166, beginning "If we'd meet someother how. . ."

Characters: Quite properly the Queen dominates the play at every moment. She is imperious, vulgar, violent and determined. Above all she is pathetic and human. Essex, ambitious, reckless, proud, is a perfect foil for her. Both are victims of the plotting and intrigue of the court. Compare the creeping, designing Cecil with Burghley. Does the character of Raleigh emerge completely? Discuss the author's gift for 1) poetic expression, 2) portrayal of character; and 3) giving an immediate presence to historical characters and situations as illustrated in this play.

Structure: This play is much more than a chronicle or a series of episodes. It is closely-knit, coherent, and each scene leads inevitably into the next. The final tragic climax is unavoidable. This shows the author's genius in handling his material—making the play's outcome the result of the characters themselves. Read Act III.

2. Both Your Houses, a Political Satire

Theme: By "both your houses" the author is referring to the senators and representatives making up the national Congress. The message is fairly obvious—the waste of money, the dishonesty and insanity of these "representatives of the people." The playwright, however, does not lose his head, does not descend to cheap melodrama to insure attention, and his villains are so only from the standpoint of political idealism. They are "willing victims of a system rather than villains of a piece." As presented are they any more to be blamed for what goes on than the people back home who voted for them? This idea can lead to a valuable discussion of women's share in political reform.

Characters: What constitutes the real drama of this play? Is it not the characters themselves? Is not Fitzmaurice a very human character, and humorous, in spite of his admitted political depravity? What is the reason for putting this sort of character, with his revealing speeches, into the play? Who is the author's mouthpiece? What is your opinion of a man like Simeon Gray? Notice the clearly defined characterization. No two characters could possibly be confused. Contrast the two girls, Marjorie and Bus. Read Fitzmaurice's speeches to Alan on pages 102, 161, and elsewhere.

Structure: There is little action, but the spirited, satiric and slangy dialog and the expressive characterization take care of that. Here again the author has let his subject-matter dictate the form, thus giving much freedom of technique. One critic called this little more than a "crook play." Show why he is wrong, if you think he is. Read Act III, Scene II.

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CHAPTER III

PAUL GREEN, FEARLESS ARTIST

And I would say that indoors sooner or later man must perish, and outdoors there is more of a chance for him.

—GREEN

Paul Green, born on a North Carolina farm in 1894, turned to the life he knew best when he began to write plays in Professor Koch's class at the University of North Carolina. And later in his short stories, some of which are as good as any written by an American, he expresses the lives of these same people with poetry and imagination and sympathy rarely met. Though Mr. Green is best known as a dramatist, and he has written some fifty plays, most of them one-act and all of them dealing with the life of the people he knows, he has two novels to his credit also. *This Body the Earth,* published a year ago, is in many ways as good as anything he has done. In everything he writes, stories, plays and novels, there is the same deep understanding of human beings, the same unmistakable musical rhythm. And what he lacks in the mastery of technique he makes up for, almost, with this outpouring of genuine feeling.

A few years ago he wrote: "Back with my own folks, and I mean black and white . . . I can't help feeling that they are experiencing life that no art can compass. . . There among them I felt at home as I'll never feel at home elsewhere. The smell of their sweaty bodies, the gusto of their indecent jokes, the knowledge of their twisted philosophies, the sight of their feet entangled among pea vines and grass, their shouts, grunts and bellyachings, the sun blistering down upon them and the rim of the sky enclosing them forever, all took me wholly, and I was one of them—neither black nor white, but one of them, children of the moist earth underfoot." This, it seems to us, is the source and keynote of Paul Green's plays. Especially is it true of his first full-length play, *In Abraham's Bosom,* which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1927; in *The House of Connelly* perhaps less so, for in this play the author does not seem quite so much at home.

In his excellent book on the American theatre, *Upstage,* the dramatic critic John Mason Brown has caught the spirit of Mr. Green's plays when he says:

"His plays throb with music—not only the music of the spinnets, the banjos and the guitars which ring out in them all, or of the hymns and spirituals into which they constantly break—but also of the rich, cascading melody that is natural to the daily speech and 'sweet potato' voices of his people. As he scores their dialect, with his poet's ear, it stirs with rhythms which have something of a Biblical magnificence about them. And as he uses their everyday words, he fills his sentences with an idiom which is as picturesque as it is moving in its innocence. Little wonder, therefore, that Barrett H. Clark should say, 'The more I read of his significant work, the more firmly I am convinced that Mr. Green is doing for our drama what the writers of the spirituals have done for Negro music.' Because, by limiting himself to writing only in the verbal and emotional idioms of the North Carolina people that he knows, Mr. Green has not confined the drama. Paradoxically enough, he has extended its province."

The plays chosen for study are *In Abraham's Bosom,* "the biography of a Negro," and *The House of Connelly,* in which the author "has sought to show men and women in the grip of rot and long-past loyalties, striving to break through . . . into exuberant and positive living." Mr. Green has written several long plays since *The House of Connelly* was produced in New York in 1931. In these he is reaching out for a broader, more comprehensive medium of expression. Whether this is a step forward is a question that cannot be answered here.

Subjects for Study

1. Paul Green's Life and Writings

His youth and early education.
He teaches country school and enters the University.
He goes to war.
Professor Koch's class in playwriting. He wins the prize.
Studies at Cornell University and returns to North Carolina as a teacher of philosophy and editor of *The Reviewer.* He wins the Pulitzer Prize and studies in Europe, 1928-29.
He goes to Hollywood. What he says about it. (See: *The Theatre and the Screen,* p. 1)
His short stories and novels. His plays and what they stand for.

2. In Abraham's Bosom

Theme: Here is the struggle—and inevitable defeat—of the mulatto Abraham to lift himself up out of the slavery of ignorance in order to hold out a hand to his fellow Negroes, only to reap the "contempt of the Negroes and the wrath of the white man." To what element, or elements, would you contribute Abraham's failure? Is he himself his greatest enemy? Discuss the source of his downfall.

Characters: This is probably the first American play, with the exception of O'Neill's *Emperor Jones,* that treats the Negro as a human being of inherent dignity. Abraham is the victim of an inner confusion, due, the implication is, to his mixed blood. He has the ambition and aspirations and pride of the white man and the weakness, superstition and inability to *reason* of some black men. Notice the clearly defined character types in Scene I; also in the schoolhouse scene. Contrast the character of Abraham with that of the other Negro characters. Do you think that Lonnie and his father, and the other white people who do not actually appear on the stage, mean to be unkind to Abe? Or are they caught in the race situation just as the Negro is? Is this an insoluble problem? Discuss this if you care to, though the author is free from pros or cons.

Structure: The structure of this play has been criticized rather severely by some New York critics. Others have felt that the structure is sound enough. What is your opinion? The plot is of the simplest—a series of episodes. Do you think the scenes are too much of the same color and tone? Do you think there is sufficient comedy for relief? Notice the bold emotional lift that comes at the end of each scene. Read Scenes 5 and 6.

3. The House of Connelly

Theme: There is little that is original in the theme of this play; it has been used time and again. This is unimportant if the author is able to bring his characters to life and give them speeches that are fresh and original. Has he met these requirements? What is the problem here that is so much more important than merely saving the plantation?

Characters: Are the characters clearly defined? What have the two old Negresses to do with the movement of the play? Are they a part of the local color or do they "huddle like fates in the shadows"? Do you feel that the two sisters and the mother are clearly drawn? Is the mother's tight-lipped decorum, as portrayed, more a matter of weakness than gentility? Show how Uncle Bob typifies a certain sort of Southern character. How well has the author succeeded with him? Contrast the characters Will and Patsy. What does each symbolize?

Structure: This is not an ingenious plot, nor was it meant to be. In the first scenes atmosphere is established while in the later scenes there is more action. What do you think of Uncle Bob's suicide? Is it in line with his character and temperament? What do you think of the scene where Patsy explains the beginning of her love for Will and her original intention of trapping him? Would it have been more dramatic if this had been shown rather than reported? The dramatic critic Stark Young says that this play is at its source poetic—"by which I mean the richness, quiver and dilation that it often gives to material presented." And another has said that "despite its elements of violence, it is tender without sentimentality and almost wholly beautiful." Since this element is so much a part of the play it might be worthwhile to discuss it at some length. Read Act II.

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CHAPTER IV

LENNOX ROBINSON, DRAMATIST OF REALISM

But though it is comparatively easy to beget children, once born they are hard to control.

—Lennox Robinson

Lennox Robinson, born in Cork, Ireland, in 1886, says that his devotion to the theatre dates from his first visit to a playhouse when he was sixteen years old. "One hot summer afternoon," he says, "I saw a performance by the Abbey Theatre Company. A little later I turned a story of my sister's into a one-act play and sent it to that theatre; amazingly it was accepted. . . A longer play was written and played six months later; and being the first realistic Irish peasant play, made a small stir." Thus began Robinson's connection with the famous Abbey Theatre, a connection which has continued to this day.

W. B. Yeats, seeing his possible worth to the Theatre, sent Robinson to London to study the management and production methods of a successful English repertory company there which was producing plays by Shaw, Galsworthy, Barrie, and Barker. Here he had a period of practical study and in 1910 returned to Dublin as the Abbey Theatre's manager and producer. In 1923 he became its director. Under his management it has more and more come to resemble the English Repertory Theatre, possibly because Robinson is one of that Irish group of writers "whose spiritual home is in England."

Writing of his childhood, Deborah Tyndall describes Robinson as "a thin, big-eyed, delicate-looking little boy, with a solemn face, with hair very thin and fine in texture; almost straight and none too thick." But in his twenties he suddenly grew a shock of thick, curling locks. His father, a Church of Ireland clergyman, remarked wittily, that he wondered whether Lennox grew this shock of hair because he had become a writer, or had become a writer because he had grown a mass of unruly curls. Today Robinson is six feet six inches tall, slight and dark, and "faintly recalling W. B. Yeats in appearance."

Robinson has visited America frequently. He has lectured in many of our large cities. In the summer of 1929 he gave a six weeks' course at the University of Michigan and the next year lec-

tured at the State University of Montana. On these visits he has expressed surprise that the American playwrights have written "so few homely, realistic plays smelling of the soil."

Robinson's earlier plays, written under the influence of Ibsen, are melancholy and without the sprightly humor of his later dramas. No doubt it was with these earlier plays in mind that he has been spoken of as the "dramatist of discontent," for there is nothing in his plays of recent years to deserve this characterization. His plays may, roughly, be divided into two groups: (1) those dealing with Irish life in small communities; and (2) those dealing with Irish politics. Robinson, however, does not wish his plays to be considered as political tracts. He is first of all a playwright; his frequent choice of political subjects is a natural Irish interest, due to the political upheavals from which Ireland has suffered for so many years.

Subjects for Study

1. Lennox Robinson and His Plays

His connection with the Abbey Theatre as producer and manager.
His similarity to the English dramatists, and earlier Abbey Theatre type of play.
His place among other Irish dramatists and producers.
The chief difference between his plays and those of O'Casey.

2. The Whiteheaded Boy

Theme: Can hardly be said to have a serious theme. It is rather "an unpretentious, gay, spirited piece of entertainment." A picture of a working-class family whose one desire is to have one of its sons become a doctor of medicine,—characteristic of the Irish lower middle class. See Denis' speech to the family, Act I. "Yes, I'm different now, . . ."

Characters: The characters are quaint, unusual, picturesque. Are they also within the bounds of probability? Is "Baby" a comic flapper, or a thwarted woman who has not been permitted to grow up? For a true revelation of Denis' character, read his speech of self-justification in Act I. The charm of this play lies chiefly in the delicate, indulgent portrayal of its characters, and the natural ease with which they move to an inevitable conclusion. Aunt Ellen is a masterpiece of humorous characterization.

Structure: Evolved from inside rather than imposed from without. The characters decide the structure, we feel, rather than the author. Note that the opening scene is carried by women, except for Donough's short appearance. The exposition here is purposeful and definite. Is Robinson's manner so plain? Act I sweeps up to George's bitter tirade against Denis. Note that the curtain of Act II, where stress and pressure is usually whipped up by the author, is no noisier than the curtain of Act I. Could this play have had another ending? Notice Robinson's stage directions. Read Act II.

3. The Big House

Theme: Robinson is concerned here with another class of Irish society—the aristocracy. He shows how the gentry reacted to the brutal treatment of the lower classes during one of the Irish uprisings. It shows that a noble character cannot be intimidated by unthinking force. Is it convincing? Discuss this theme in reference to the character of Kate. Note Irish mysticism in appearance of Ulick's ghostly voice.

Characters: Study Kate's developing personality. Is she a good theatre character? Compare her character with that of her father. Compare the scene between Kate and Despard in Scene I, beginning "Poor father!" with the conversation between them in Scene II.

Structure: Once more Robinson's structure is almost flawless, there is such perfect unity between form and content. Has this play, however, the same smooth evolving of form as has *The Whiteheaded Boy?*

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CHAPTER V

SEAN O'CASEY, PORTRAYER OF SLUM LIFE

My only club is Jim Larkin's Trade Union.
—O'Casey

Sean O'Casey, child of poverty and misery, was born in 1884. His birthplace and school were the slums and streets of Dublin. As a young child he sold newspapers, and at the age of twelve years taught himself to read. When he reached manhood he became one of those thousands in every city known as "general laborer." He welcomed whatever work came to hand, from breaking rocks on the roads to carrying great hods of brick and mortar on his strong shoulders. For a while he was a dock-worker, and later rose to be a builder's assistant.

As a laborer he was ever anxious to improve the lot of his fellows. In 1913, as a member of the Irish Transport Workers' Union he helped lead them through a strike, wearing shoes that were frequently re-soled with ordinary cardboard. And three years later he fought with the Irish Citizens Army in the streets of Dublin. In connection with these disturbances he wrote two booklets, one "A History of the Irish Citizens Army," and the other a pamphlet entitled "The Story of Thomas Ashe." Thomas Ashe was a patriot in the revolt.

Whenever he had a little free time he would go around to the Abbey Theatre and watch the production of their plays. Here it must have been that the desire to write for the stage was born, and no doubt his knowledge of what constitutes a play was obtained here. Henceforth his leisure hours were devoted to writing. It is said that the Abbey Theatre rejected eight of his dramas before finally accepting *The Shadow of a Gunman* for production. These refusals, however, were made always with encouraging criticisms, and O'Casey accepted them with profit.

The Shadow of a Gunman was a great success and O'Casey was invited to join the Abbey Theatre. This he did and his forthcoming working-class plays were awaited with unusual excitement. Never deserting his fellow laborers, however, he would return to his work with them whenever he was in need of money. In 1924 *Juno and the Paycock* was produced and eager play-goers packed the little

Theatre night after night. They laughed indulgently at "Captain" Boyle and shed a tear for poor Juno. This play was produced and accepted as a comedy, but O'Casey calls it a tragedy.

The Plough and the Stars was produced in 1926 and caused a riot the fourth night of its performance. A group of women were offended by the appearance of the Irish tri-color in a public house and set up a commotion in an attempt to stop the play. During the stampede William Butler Yeats mounted the stage and shouted above the protesting voices: "You have once more rocked the cradle of a reputation. The fame of O'Casey is born tonight." Then he rushed bareheaded from the building, gathered a crowd of his friends and returned with them. They applauded vigorously from the gallery and insisted that the play continue.

All of O'Casey's plays, says Curtis Canfield, take place at some period of stress, and as a result the presence "of impending disaster hangs over these Dublin slums like a pall, and the people of the plays are caught and held at a point of great intensity brought about by . . feverish uncertainty. ."

Padriac Colum, a fellow Irish writer, describes O'Casey as a man with a long and powerful body and the long and muscular arms of one who has wielded the pick-axe. He has "a salient nose, and a face that bears the marks of the many illnesses he has endured." He is dreamy-eyed and shabbily dressed. Elsewhere he has been described "a lone man, hard, unschooled, aloof from literary folk."

Perhaps too much prominence has been given to O'Casey's life as a common laborer. He was much more than that; even at the time of his first dramatic success he was a well-read man, familiar with Shaw and Balzac, as well as most of the poets and modern writers. Few college graduates can claim as much.

His plays, previous to *Within the Gates,* which was produced in New York in 1934, have in them "the riotous color and tang of Irish working people, who, like himself, lived in tenements, and were dock laborers, hod carriers and stone breakers." In *Within the Gates* he experiments with a new technique, leaves Ireland behind, and takes his stand in a new and unconventional theatre.

The Plough and the Stars and *Juno and the Paycock* are, however, considered by most dramatic critics his most successful and representative plays.

Subjects for Study

1. Juno and the Paycock

Theme: One of O'Casey's favorite themes is showing what happens to the peasant character as a result of being transplanted from the country hut to the city tenement. O'Neill is concerned with the nature of man while O'Casey is interested in presenting realistically the effect of environment on his characters. Show how this interest expresses itself in this play. For a statement of the two main threads of the play read the first two speeches; Mary's speech refers to Johnny's treason, while Juno is speaking of Boyle's profligacy. Notice the fine balance between the comic and tragic elements throughout.

Characters: Chiefly a play of character. Boyle is a familiar figure; Johnny with his frayed nerves, fretful whining and weakness; Mary, aspiring to a better life and betrayed by the well-dressed fortune-hunter; Joxer the poisonous, flattering companion—all have been met in life. Juno is the staff on which they all lean for support. Does she lack sufficient strength to bear up under their weight? What elements of character does Juno lack which prevent her from being a really tragic figure? Contrast the characters of Boyle and Joxer. Notice the quick turn from grief to joy; for instance, the funeral of Mrs. Tancred's son.

Structure: The action takes place at a moment of great stress—the civil war between the newly created Irish Free State and the Republicans, which brought tragedy to many Irish homes. Has the plot any special originality? If not, what are its familiar elements? Is this play essentially photographic or does the author explore the regions behind the surface? Discuss O'Casey's style and his gift for easy, natural conversation.

2. The Plough and the Stars

Theme: The action of this play takes place during the Easter rebellion of 1916, and shows the tragedy that can come to those who took no part in it. It also convinces us of the inability of the Irish tenement dwellers to agree on any subject, however trivial, at that time, and their love of a fight for itself alone. The author does not take sides either with the British or the revolutionists, so the play remains essentially one of character and personal tragedy, due to the futility of war.

Characters: Fluther, who reminds one of Falstaff, typifies the slum character, and helps to unify the play. Is there any special reason why Rosie should be in the play, except to enrich the scene in the pub by her smart remarks? What do you think of Bessie Burgess as

a stage character? All the characters are clearly defined, and not new to the stage. Their speech has more originality than they have. Discuss Nora's character and the plausibility of her insanity.

Structure: The plot is episodic and comparatively simple. Notice the author's genius for transcribing human speech. The setting is essentially the same as that of *Juno and the Paycock,* but the canvas is larger and less attention is paid to the formal structure here. The first two acts are almost unrelieved comedy, but they prepare the way for the fourth act of unrelieved tragedy. Which seems the best act of the play, that is, the most sincere, direct and least sentimental? It has been reported that this play is being made into a movie. Why is it better material for the movie medium than certain other plays—*Juno,* for instance? Read Act I and compare with Act III.

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CHAPTER VI

HENRI-RENÉ LENORMAND, DRAMATIST OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

All my plays tend toward the elucidation of the mystery of the inner life, toward solving the enigma that man presents to himself. —LENORMAND

It is impossible to conceive of the Continental theatre today without the plays of Henri-René Lenormand. He was born in Paris in 1882, the son of a musician and writer who is famed for his translation of *L'Anthologie de l'Amour Asiatique* and of poems from the Chinese, Persian, and Polynesian. To his father, some have said, the son owes the exotic touch present in so many of his plays.

Lenormand's first literary venture was a volume of prose poems entitled *Paysages d'Ame.* The subjects he chose to write about were such as desire, illness, and anguish. These poems were undistinguished but indicated the trend of interest of the young author. Soon after this, however, in 1905, he shocked the addicts of horror at the Grand Guignol Theatre in Paris with the presentation of a two-scene thriller called *White Madness.* Although only a short and somewhat amateurish piece, it suggested the subtlety present in his later plays. Longer plays followed this—all "tending toward the elucidation of the mystery of the inner life." For a while Lenormand showed the influence of Ibsen by a challenge of accepted standards and a spirit of defiance. His play, *The Awakening of Instinct,* was written during this period.

Then he came to read the books of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. This was in 1917. Lenormand must have felt that he had come across an old friend, for he had already set his interest in two Freudian elements, the influence of the unconscious, and the psychology of sex. After reading Freud he says, "the universe took on a new meaning." There is no doubt that the Austrian psychiatrist influenced him deeply, for henceforth he devoted himself in his writings to the conflict in man between his instincts and conscience. This is the common *motif* in all of his later plays. These are written in a series of *tableaux,* rather than acts, usually "depicting a moral descent, a process of gradual disintegration."

Lenormand has often been dealt with harshly by some dramatic critics and literary groups; and he has also been helped by the enthusiasm of others. The French producer Gemier regards him as "the dramatist who has made the strongest impression upon our theatre." And when a group of nearly a hundred writers founded the "Theatre des Jeunes Auteurs" he was elected president without a dissenting vote. However, the author of *Failures,* and *Time is A Dream* needs neither praise nor accusation. His works speak for themselves and place him in the ranks of the world's important dramatists.

The critic John Palmer says of Lenormand: "M. Lenormand is the child of his generation, but he is an uneasy and recalcitrant child. He is obsessed with the problem of evil; he is abnormally sensitive to its presence; and he gives to it dramatic form and expression with an intensity and power unequalled in modern literature. But fundamentally he is a good moralist."

The two plays chosen for study were widely acclaimed when they were first produced in Geneva, Switzerland. Later they were brought to Paris where they were enthusiastically received; and since then they have been produced in London, Vienna, Berlin, Amsterdam, and Warsaw. *Failures* was presented by the Theatre Guild of New York in 1923.

Subjects for Study

1. Lenormand's Dramatic Works

The titles given his plays an indication of their dream quality.
His preoccupation with the positive force of evil. How this concept differs from that of the pre-Victorian thinkers and coincides with the Biblical point of view.
His use of the *Oedipus motif.* His similarity to some of the classical writers.
His terse, objective, lucid style.
Which of his plays illustrate the above points?

2. Failures

Theme: Here is the gradual disintegration of a group of persons shown in a series of revealing episodes. Is their inevitable failure due to the fact that their aspirations have outrun their talents and strength of character, or is it because of external circumstances? This gradual moral break-down is one of Lenormand's favorite themes. Notice

the idealism of He and She's relationship, which is never clouded, regardless of the sordidness and poverty of their surroundings. Do you think that death is the only solution for their tangled lives?

Characters: You will see that Lenormand treats these characters with tender understanding—all except Larnaudy who is the greatest failure of all because he will not admit that he is. In what respect does Larnaudy differ from the other characters? Is he hypnotized by display and hollow verbiage? Notice the richness and variety of even the minor characters. Contrast the character and temperaments of the two lovers. Why does Lenormand simply call them He and She?

Structure: The structure of this play is extremely simple. The style is narrative and the scenes are episodic. One might call it a series of *tableaux,* for there is no development of character or situation on the stage, before your eyes. All this takes place off the stage and is reported or shown in the scenes. Notice the ironic turn at the end where Larnaudy reports the murder. Do you feel that the author's style is perhaps too economical and concise, giving the whole an artificial touch? Read Scene I and notice Montredon's speech on page 8 where he forecasts the substance of the play.

3. Time Is a Dream

Theme: This play is even more Freudian than *Failures.* Here the "subconscious" is ever apparent. For a statement of the theme read Nico's speech to Romee in Scene II, page 183. Do you feel that the problem, or condition, here stated involves enough of the human element to make a living, moving drama? What is your feeling about the play as a whole, in regard to this quality of humanity?

Characters: Contrast the "atmosphere" of these characters with that of the characters in *Failures.* Do you feel that Nico, Romee, Riemke, and especially Saidyah are almost wholly creations of Lenormand's imagination? This brings up the question of to what extent an author is justified artistically in giving his imagination full scope in the creation of character. Would you discuss this? Would you call these persons realistic creations? Do the stories of Edgar Allan Poe come to mind?

Structure: Once again the structure is very simple—a series of scenes showing his characters at chosen moments, with the same gradual breakdown of only one character here—Nico. Is there any doubt that Nico will be drowned in the lake? Discuss Lenormand's dramatic style as illustrated in *Failures* and *Time is a Dream.*

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CHAPTER VII

FRANK WEDEKIND, TRAGIC COMEDIAN

The best fortune is to sleep more soundly than others, and to forget. —*Box of Pandora*

"Life," says Frank Wedekind, "is brutal and bad, and that which affords joy inflicts pain in larger measure. Men and women are pitiful creatures, the slaves of instinct, and the business of art is to show them convulsed by desire and battling one with another."

Few persons indeed would agree with this harsh and pessimistic view of humanity; but Wedekind, always preoccupied with the problems of abnormal psychology and the *mores* of submerged society, had been deeply affected, and that he achieved this philosophy is not surprising. It is the keynote of most of his plays and suggests the pessimism of the Swedish playwright, Strindberg, whose works he admired.

Of Wedekind's personal appearance and idiosyncrasies Arthur Eloesser says that "he was somewhat lame on one foot, he delighted to recite *Schaerballaden* of betrayed maidens and murdered aunts at Munich cabarets," accompanying himself on the guitar; that he spoke as he wrote, "in a dictatorial and over-emphatic tone, with enormous impressiveness and a fatal monotony absolutely lacking in light and shade." He had a commanding eye, a heavy profile, and "a face like nobody else's, for it might equally well have been that of an ascetic or a melancholy clown."

Wedekind's father, a German physician, lived in San Francisco from the beginning of the gold rush in 1848 to 1864, made a fortune in land ventures and returned to his old home, Hanover, Germany. Here he purchased an old chateau and settled down. It was this year, 1864, that his son Frank, one of six children, was born.

Wedekind's education was without particular direction, but he was a great reader and delved into the theories of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. He was possessed of the passion to explore the concealed channels of instinctive life, and he read and wrote constantly. Against his wishes he was persuaded to study law at the University of Munich. But he neglected his work for the companionship of artists and the Bohemian life. He came to know the leaders of the modernist movement, including the anarchist poet John

Henry McKay, and the two brothers Hauptmann. Through McKay he discovered the writings of Nietzsche and Strindberg.

When his father died in 1888 Wedekind abandoned the law and began to squander his money in frequent visits to London and Paris where he explored the moral vagaries of the *demi-monde*. "All of which dissipation," says Montrose Moses, "had undoubted effect on him."

Soon thereafter, Wedekind settled in Munich as political editor of the newspaper *Simplicissimus*. A few years later the editors of the paper were convicted of *lèse majesté*, and Wedekind with them. He escaped to Paris, but finally, on the advice of friends, gave himself up and served his sentence in the fortress at Koenigstein. Here he wrote his utopian *Minehaha*, a satirical forecast of the future education of women.

Typical of the misunderstanding of Wedekind's morals and creative genius among the conservatives is this expression by Montrose Moses who says: "The formless brutality of everything written by Wedekind, his bestiality, his disregard for humanity, his loathsome frankness have kept him from being generally read in English . . . he set out from early years to sound iniquity, and he took deep-sea soundings; he strove to measure the temptation of the flesh, and his reckoning was abnormal. . . The lure of sex and the bestiality of sex relations were his self-imposed themes." This is unfair, we think, for Wedekind was a fanatic for truth, and not so immoral as amoral. Edwin Muir says that "Wedekind was the original of his characters: a man who saw with the clearness of fury the barriers which stood in his way, and who made directly towards them as by the power of a mechanical, instinctive reaction. He did not understand; he only felt; and he had the arrogance of emotion which regards understanding as something which does not ease the situation. There have been few writers more naïve, more honest, and more unfortunate." Wedekind himself declares: "The reunion of holiness and beauty as the divine object of pious devotion is the purpose to which I offer my life; toward which, indeed, I have striven since earliest childhood."

Subjects for Study

1. Wedekind's Plays and Manner of Writing

Plays chronologically an expression of Wedekind's growth of mind.
Disregard of conventional plot and technique.
Fondness for gruesome situations.
Hostility toward bourgeois civilization.
Necessity for rapid, staccato delivery of speeches of characters.
"Extravagances and overemphasis, unmotivated, violent decisions and spasmodic super-vitality of his characters."

2. Spring's Awakening

Theme: Discuss the theme of this play and its shocking novelty in 1890. Note the bitter hatred Wedekind obviously felt for the adult characters in this play, and the sympathy and beauty with which he portrays the children. For Wedekind's tendency to laugh at tragedy read Moritz's speech to Melchoir, Act III, Scene VII, "At my funeral I was among the mourners. . ."

Characters: Wedekind's chief interest in this play is in Melchoir, Moritz and Wendla and their tragic fate. Are the adult characters as true and convincing as the children? Notice the literary language in which the children speak. Does this suit the mood of the play? Read Hansy's soliloquy, Act II, Scene III. This play is dedicated "To The Muffled Gentleman." What significance has this?

Structure: There are nineteen scenes in this play. Does this hamper its effectiveness? Notice that Act II, Scene III, and Act III, Scene IV can be lifted from the play without detriment. How does this indicate Wedekind's utter disregard of form and technique? The keynote of the play is sounded in the first line spoken.
Read Act I.

3. Earth Spirit

Theme: Lulu is the personification of sex attraction. This play is an attempt to dramatize man's impulse toward woman. It could be considered Lulu's play or a "dramatization of something in man for which woman is only the external embodiment."

Characters: Is the character of Lulu convincing as a woman, or does she merely remain a symbol? What knowledge brings about Schon's downfall? It is not Lulu's unfaithfulness. Is the Countess Geschwitz much more than a phantom?

Structure: Significance of the Prologue. Wedekind has called civilization a "domesticated zoo." Wedekind himself speaks the lines of the

animal tamer and voices his own opinion of humanity. Compare the structure of this play with that of *Spring's Awakening.*

Read Act IV. Also, you might read *Pandora's Box,* a sequel to *Earth Spirit,* in which is shown the complete disintegration and downfall of Lulu.

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CHAPTER VIII

GEORG KAISER, POET OF THE INNER LIFE

I have seen the new man—in this very night was he born.
—Kaiser in *The Citizens of Calais*

"Man," says Kaiser, "is perfect from the very beginning. He is, so to speak, a finished product from the very moment of his birth. The limitations to which he finally succumbs are not part of his inner nature," but "imposed upon him from without, as a result of the distorted forms to which his destiny is subjected."

This philosophy would seem to free man from any sense of guilt or responsibility and place the source of his difficulties entirely upon the social system under which he lives. But it is difficult to conceive of a society, however sinister and malign, for which its members are not to some degree responsible. However, it is not our business to question the dramatist's philosophy but to read and enjoy his plays.

Kaiser is "an idealist of fecund imagination, a Socialist exposing flaws in the present order, an innovator in technique," and he "creates a new, free drama designed to make his audiences think. When he is most himself his plots are apologues; his *dramatis personae* are types; he is more concerned with general problems than with concrete psychology," says Chandler. And this judgment is amply demonstrated in the two plays of his selected for study.

It is an interesting observation, though perhaps not a very profound one, that in showing the misery and spiritual dwarfing suffered by the victims of a mechanistic age, Kaiser employs all of the trappings of that age. His plays are built on mechanical rather than human principles. They are "rigid, impersonal, planned in accordance with a definite architectonic design," and his devices for their staging are super-mechanistic. He employs all sorts of electrical contrivances, flashing signal-lights, turbines, megaphones, formulas, gas explosions, and startling color effects. His language he reduces to a skeletonized nakedness, especially in *From Morn to Midnight*. But this is the result, not of limp emptiness, but of an energy and urgency approaching the breaking point. Any moment, it seems, the restraining dam will burst, releasing a torrent of destructive power.

For a writer so widely read, little is known of Kaiser's life. He was born at Madgeburg, Germany, in 1878, next to the youngest of six brothers. His father was a well-to-do merchant of the town and Georg entered the gymnasium to study business and commerce, presumably to take up his father's profession. After leaving school he worked for three years with his father and was then sent to Buenos Aires, Argentina, to sell electrical appliances. He was never physically strong and this sudden change to a sub-tropical climate undermined his health. A trip on horseback, lasting a month, and extending across the country, gave him a good case of malaria, and he was forced to return home. The next eight years he spent in his rooms deprived of all normal activities. In this enforced seclusion he wrote his first play. Five years later, in 1908, he married a girl of Magdeburg and established a home in the small village of Seeheim. Three years later he was accepted into the ranks of German dramatists with the production of his third play, *The Jewish Widow.*

The World War brought Kaiser, who was just realizing a sort of financial security, many money troubles. The banks failed, currency became practically worthless and the family found itself on the verge of bankruptcy. Had it not been for the success of *From Morn to Midnight* their plight might have been serious. But the revolution of 1918-19 found Kaiser's star risen to new brightness. He was being performed all over Germany and foreign producers were rapidly becoming aware of his plays. Most of his best works have been published in this country and Kaiser is now considered the leading representative of German expressionism.

With the coming of the Hitler regime Kaiser found himself rejected by his government, and his books were suppressed and burned. He lives in the rustic village of Grünheide (Mark) on the quiet shore of a lake. He cares little for social life, rarely troubles to attend the *premières* of his own plays, and books hold slight interest for him. In fact, he has been called "an enemy of all literature."

Subjects for Study

1. From Morn to Midnight

Theme: Here are the "fragmentary scenes, the symbolic characters, the emphasis upon ideas rather than story, distinctive of expressionism." The play shows the disintegration that might set in, if one who is

accustomed to deadening routine is suddenly set free of it. The cashier's speech as he mounts the bench of penance in the Salvation Army hall gives the burden of the story: "Not with all the money from all the banks. . ." Kaiser is here undoubtedly expressing his own distrust of the power of money to buy anything really worthwhile. Do you consider this play an unanswerable attack upon modern business and industrial routine? Discuss.

Characters: The characters are essentially types, although there is a suggestion of personal warmth and comedy in the Stout Gentleman. Notice that the *dramatis personae* are without individual names. Why does Kaiser designate them in this way? The characters surrounding the Cashier fade into the background as the play progresses, throwing him into higher relief with every new adventure. Does this method of treatment bring to mind Eugene O'Neill's play, *Emperor Jones?* Notice that every illusion held by the Cashier is dispelled as soon as he tests it. No happiness is to be had outside himself, nothing worth having can be paid for with money, he is forced to believe, as disappointment heaps upon disappointment. Is the dramatist thus preaching the value of the inner life?

Structure: The form is episodic and the technique cinematographic. Things move at a swift pace, scenes change in seconds rather than minutes and the panorama is steadily shifting. Notice the great diversity of scenes—the field deep with snow, the velodrome, the cabaret and the Salvation Army hall. Discuss Kaiser's sense of the theatrical as demonstrated in this play alone. Wherein lies the power of this play? Is it in the characters, the situation, or the idea? Read Scene I and discuss Kaiser's style, its economy, suggestiveness, etc.

2. Gas

Theme: This also is a play of idea rather than character. Kaiser's faith in the spirit of man, and his dream of a social solidarity is its substance. He conceives of wealth and machinery as opposed to the realization of this ideal. Under its dominance man is not a whole being, but a hand or a foot or a pair of eyes, sentenced to serve to its death. He shows that those who labor are as attached to the system as those who control. The Fourth Act should be read in this connection. What is the all-powerful Gas a symbol of?

Characters: The characters in themselves are important only in so far as they convey the message Kaiser wishes to deliver. One would suppose that the Billionaire's Son is speaking the beliefs held by the dramatist. Are the Gentlemen in Black, the Officer, the Clerk and the Labourers something more than types? Here the author uses color in a symbolical sense—for example, black as symbolizing dignity and power, etc.

Structure: The story is fantastically unreal but it must not be forgotten that the technique is not meant to be realistic but expressionistic. The author again makes use of many mechanical gadgets to create a more theatrical effect. Perhaps the vast square room, the office of the Billionaire's Son in the First Act, symbolizes industrial efficiency, while the great circular hall in the Fourth Act is meant to suggest the new order. "If expressionism means anything at all," says Ashley Dukes, "it means the crystallization of a thought into the deliberate symmetry of drama." How does this apply to the two plays studied here? Read the Fifth Act.

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CHAPTER IX

FRANZ WERFEL, MORAL TEACHER

"There is an essential tragedy in the world . . . a break . . . an original sin. . ." —WERFEL

Like so many post-war European artists, Franz Werfel believes that tragedy is the basis of life. "The world into which mankind is born, is mad," he wrote while still a very young man. "Impulse and accident govern every path, and Intelligence, that terrible attribute of man, is asked to stand unshaken before the brutal drama of the elements. . ."

Werfel was just back from the carnage and brutality of the World War when he wrote this, and it is no wonder that he was so weary and so pessimistic, though his philosophy has not become more optimistic with the passing of years. He served his country, Austria, on the Russian Front, and bravely, though at the same time he was busy helping spread pacifist propaganda. He was discovered, and for punishment transferred to a particularly dangerous sector of the eastern Galician Front, where it was hoped he might be killed. But he came through without physical harm, though his emotional nature was deeply scarred. In his life time his country has been reduced from a proud monarchy to a small and insignificant republic, and along with that the complete breakdown of Austrian society. This has deeply influenced his writings, has given emphasis to his natural sombreness, if not melancholy. He is a man with a message for humanity, and "art for art's sake" is a philosophy with which he has little patience.

The critic Arthur Eloesser says that Franz Werfel is "the most thoroughgoing Nazarene in our literature, one who honestly cared nothing at all whether his cloak of camel's hair became him, or whether he was sufficiently picturesque to meet the pleasures of the ladies." Indeed, Werfel has never been concerned with humanity's outer life. His work has been to delve deep beneath its surfaces, and to clarify man's moral obligations. All that he has written has been done for this humanity which he loves. "He admonishes it as a wiser brother," says one of his followers, "with an anxious love or with the wrath of bitter disappointment; or he commiserates its weaknesses and ills with diffident and helpful encouragement."

Werfel was first known to American playgoers in 1926 when the Theatre Guild in New York successfully produced two of his best known plays, *The Goat Song,* and *Juarez and Maximilian.* None of his plays are easy to understand, for Werfel insists that more is meant than is immediately apparent. They are loaded with an inner significance, with a German ponderousness and impressiveness, and are an expression of Werfel's own temperament and philosophy. They have little humor.

Born at Prague, Austria, September 10, 1890, the son of a wealthy and cultured Jewish manufacturer, Werfel's artistic gifts were soon observed, and his education was directed with every care. Before he was twenty-five years old he was well known for his three published volumes of poems which expressed even then the idea of the unity and the brotherhood of all living things, and all life as based in tragedy. The two following plays have been given many different interpretations by the critics, some of them needlessly complex. The characters become symbols, and with this understanding the plays should be fairly simple.

Subjects for Study

1. Juarez and Maximilian

Theme: While Maximilian represents the will to be good at all cost, Juarez is not concerned with beneficence but only with what is right. With this in mind, how could the theme of this play be stated? Does Werfel "take sides," and is he saying "Not to be equal to one's deeds is criminal?"

Characters: Contrast the characters of Maximilian and Juarez. Is this play showing the triumph of the revolutionary spirit or the tragic fate of sheer goodness in this world? Perhaps it shows both. What do these characters represent apart from their historical nature? Notice close parallel between Jesus' life and Maximilian's.

Structure: Note the close-knit, dramatic punch of these thirteen scenes; and the poetic glow and texture of ideas throughout the play. Would Juarez's force of character have been diminished had he actually appeared in the play? No physical description of Juarez is given until the end of the play. To clarify Werfel's apparent meaning re-read the Epilogue. Read Second Scene. Note short, compressed dialogue.

2. The Goat Song

Theme: How does the theme of this play coincide with that of Juarez? Is it made clear in Act I or merely suggested? The monster is no sooner dead than Stanja reveals that she is to bear his son. Does Werfel mean, therefore, that Evil triumphs over Good?

Characters: Classify the outstanding characters and show whether they can be labeled according to types. Show if and how they fit into Werfel's philosophy of life. What does the physician represent in contrast to the other characters? And the student Juvan?

Structure: While this play keeps within the realm of literal fact has it not an allegorical meaning? What is this greater significance? Compare with *Juarez and Maximilian.* Do you feel that the play deepens as it moves to its climax? Read Acts I and V and compare.

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CHAPTER X

THE ROMANTIC MOLNAR

"Cynicism suggests a deep philosophy of life. Sophistication is not a philosophy, but it is a means to make life more charming, more interesting." —MOLNAR

Ferenc Molnar, born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1878, seems never to have known obscurity or failure. The success he most wanted always came to him with a lavishness awarded few men of letters. His father, he says, was a physician, though his English translator says he is the son of a "wealthy Jewish merchant." In any case he grew up in surroundings of material well-being, a circumstance fortunate for Molnar, for always he has loved luxury, gayety, and brilliant social life. "With his full-moon face, and that smooth, round monocle which glistens under his eye like some lunar lake the Hungarian dramatist seems an overgrown boy masquerading. Like a boy, he makes no effort to act otherwise than he feels. His moods have become a legend," writes William Leon Smyser in 1929.

In America Molnar is known chiefly through his plays, of which two score or more have been translated into English and many produced by the Theatre Guild in New York. In Europe his literary reputation hangs equally upon his short shories and novels. He is, however, a dramatist by nature, even to the extent of his personal life, incidents of which he has woven into many plays. It is said that his most original play, *Liliom,* was written to justify himself against his first wife's charge in court that he had struck their child. And soon thereafter, when he had fallen in love with an actress, Irene Varsanyi, he wrote *The Devil.* Later he used this same situation as a basis for *The Guardsman,* made noteworthy in this country through the skilful acting of Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt. Even in his talking and thinking Molnar is always creating situations in an imaginary play.

Molnar tried to be a lawyer but the lure of literary fame was not to be resisted. When he was eighteen years old he began writing short, humorous sketches and witty dialogues for a Budapest newspaper. So successful was he that in a short time he became a national figure, the newspaper had doubled its circulation, and he

had married the editor's daughter, Margaret Vaszi. From her he was divorced two years later. Molnar sprang into a novelist and playwright of some importance before he was twenty-three years old.

His plays are like their author, clever, urbane, witty, worldly, ingenious, and lacking in any particular depth. Molnar brings Bernard Shaw to mind, but he is more genial, less earnest and less intellectual. Unlike Shaw he is not driven by any desire to right the world. He writes, not from any wish to bring about reforms, but simply because he wants to, and because he enjoys the fame and wealth showered on him by his admirers. He writes about what he sees, not what he would like to see. With all this he is still the leading dramatist in Hungary, though not the most profound.

In 1907 when *The Devil* was produced in Budapest, Molnar over night found himself sought after and lionized by society. And even after two years' unbroken run this play was still crowding the theatre. Now it was that his greatest play, *Liliom,* was first produced. The critics and playgoers were bewildered. This confusing piece of fantasy, certainly, "he had carried to unintelligible lengths," thought they. Misunderstood, this play was withdrawn after a few performances, and Molnar, accustomed only to success, "became timid, wary of failure, too anxious to please his public." "An odd situation, truly," say his translator, "and in some aspects a tragic one. Genius lacking the courage to spread its wings and soar. A potential immortal bidding fearfully for the praise of a coffee-house clique." Ten years later *Liliom* was revived. Its success was unprecedented and Molnar once more became the favorite of Budapest.

Subjects for Study

1. Liliom as a Play of Naturalism and Fantasy

Note poetic combination of realism and idealism, the mixture of rough humor, pathos and brutality.

Presumably this is Liliom's play, but notice the emphasis Molnar places on the character of Julie.

Do you think that Scene VI is necessary to the play? Discuss Molnar's treatment of this scene. Whose conception of heaven is this? the author's or Liliom's?

When Liliom is brought home dead Julie is apathetic. She agrees even that his death is lucky for her. Yet notice her speech to him when she is

alone: "Sleep, Liliom, sleep. . ." Do you think Julie is speaking truthfully in both cases?

Discuss the structure of the play and the clear-cut characterization.

2. The Glass Slipper

Here is a study of ugly, brutal character types in a cheap boarding house. What magic does Molnar use to create from them a play of charm and beauty?

Does the character of Irma, especially in the first act, bring the playwright Barrie to mind?

Is the solution of the play convincing? What other ending might Molnar have employed?

Does the characterization make up for weakness of plot?

What is the theme? Discuss it.

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CHAPTER XI

KAREL CAPEK, LOVER OF ALL KNOWLEDGE

"Whether I am called an optimist or a pessimist will make me neither happier nor sadder; yet, 'to be a pessimist' implies, it would seem, a silent rebuke from the world for bad behavior."

—CAPEK

Karel Capek, born in the mountains of northern Bohemia, has won fame in many fields other than that of the drama. He is an important novelist; he is a dramatic manager and producer; he is a delightful essayist; and his short stories have been read throughout the world.

In 1922 he wrote a letter to the New York *Times* in which he said:

"I was born in 1890 and came from a doctor's family. I studied philosophy at Prague, Berlin and Paris. I am a doctor of philosophy, a journalist, playwright, and manager of the Vinhradsky Theatre at Prague. I wrote chiefly stories, *God's Sufferings* (stories of pain, torture, and torment), published a book about William James, John Dewey, etc. Frankly speaking, American philosophy influenced me most. . ." Capek was only thirty-two years old when he wrote this letter. He can be forgiven for the suggestion of pride, for with the production of his second play, *R. U. R.*, he had suddenly become one of the most popular dramatists in Europe.

From early youth Capek studied the natural sciences with zeal. In this his father, who hoped that this brilliant son would become a doctor of medicine, encouraged him. But the desire to write was too strong to be ignored. His first efforts took the form of humorous sketches, short prose experiments, and dramatic trifles. On several occasions he has collaborated with his older brother Joseph, who is a painter and writer. Together they wrote *The Life of the Insects,* a satirical presentation of the human comedy, which was produced in New York as *The World We Live In.* His sister Helena is also a writer; but of the three Karel is the most vigorous and imaginative.

When the World War broke out Capek wanted to go, but his physical condition prevented. He became a tutor in a wealthy Austrian family. Here he found leisure to study and read to his heart's

content; and here he wrote his first play, though he had not been inside a theatre a dozen times. But his inordinate craving for learning was not satisfied. Ten years later he expressed the ambition to write a hundred books before his death, and vowed that he would take all human knowledge as his province. He quoted Fiona Macleod's remark that the man who knows all must die, and added: "But I hope not to die until I know all." Then someone asked: "The man, yes, but the woman?" "Ah," said the young playwright, "for her that is not necessary, for she is all—she is life."

Of himself he says: "I am without character. I am both man and woman. I am all, everybody, nothing. When I am creating a woman it comes to me that I am she." Capek knows many languages; he has made a serious study of several fields of knowledge, among them ethnology, folklore, psychology, physics and chemistry. He is described as "dark, slender, wiry, modest and hesitant in manner, and vigorous and biting in speech."

When *R. U. R.* was performed in New York in 1922 the novelty of its idea and unusual treatment was met with spontaneous enthusiasm. The critics could not say enough in its favor. It was designated as "the most brilliant satire on our mechanical civilization." About *The Makropoulos Secret* Capek himself says: "A short life is better for mankind, for a long life would deprive man of his optimism. . . In this comedy I have striven to present something delightful and optimistic."

Subjects for Study

1. R. U. R., a Satirical Melodrama

Theme: This play brings to mind Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein* in which the monster created by man turns upon him and destroys him. But Capek has much more to say. He is preaching the folly of looking upon work as a curse; of regarding industrial efficiency as an end in itself; and of believing that freedom from toil will produce a race of super-men. He shows further the punishment that is inevitable if we look upon the working man simply as a machine whose only reason for existence is to contribute to our idleness and uselessness. For an exposition of the theme and purpose read Act I, especially the conversation between Helena and Domin. Notice, also, the opposing philosophy of Alquist.

Characters: Capek is less concerned with the development of characters in this play than with the exposition of a philosophy. Notice, how-

ever, that he has given to his two women greater wisdom and human understanding than to the men, with the exception of Alquist who believes in the virtue of toil.

Structure: Can you conceive of a more theatrically effective play than this must be on the stage? The opening, for example, where "efficiency" is carried to the point of madness; the entrance of the Robots Marius and Sulla; and the quickened pace at the end of Act I. Notice the atmosphere of terror at the end of Act III, and the frantic searching of Alquist for a formula in the Epilogue. Do you think this feeling of urgency is heightened by the short, staccato speeches? Even if you disagree with Capek's philosophy as expressed in this play, what do you think of *R. U. R.* as a searching study of human life and society? Discuss this. Read Act III.

2. The Makropoulos Secret

Theme: The undesirability of an indefinitely long life-span is the idea of this play. Compare it with Bernard Shaw's play *Back to Methuselah.* What is the chief difference in the method of treatment? Do you believe that Capek is correct in his theory that human experience would merely repeat itself, thus producing an *ennui* to which death is preferable? But of course the reader must accept his assumption in order to enjoy the full meaning of the play. Notice that the theme is not revealed until the last act.

Characters: Emilia Marty is the pivotal character. All the other characters revolve around her. This goes to form a compactness seldom seen in a play. If Emilia were less provocative would this arrangement not tend to weaken the play? Here again Capek endows his women characters with great understanding. Even the scrub-woman said of Emilia "I am kind of sorry for her." Notice the distinct and unerring characterizations. Contrast Kristina and Emilia, and Gregor and Prus. How do their differences add to the tone and color of the play?

Structure: Here is a highly complicated plot, though the framework is simple. What could be the author's reason for this confusion? Notice the slow emergence of information, bit by bit, keeping uncertainty and curiosity at full tide. What elements has this play in common with a detective story? Though this is a comedy the play has moments of tragedy. What are some of these? Read Act III and discuss the implications of its philosophy.

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CHAPTER XII

LUIGI PIRANDELLO, DRAMATIST OF PERSONALITY

"A man, I have tried to tell something to other men, without any ambition, except perhaps that of avenging myself for having been born." —PIRANDELLO

Luigi Pirandello, born in Sicily in 1867, began his literary career as a poet at the age of eighteen. His father wanted him to go into business and put him to work in his store. But the young man was ill-suited to such a career and spent most of his time writing poems. Within a few years he had published five volumes. When he was twenty-three years old he turned to fiction writing and by middle age had written twenty volumes of short stories and three full-length novels. These brought him fame but little money. His novel, *The Late Mattia Pascal,* published in Italy in 1904, and in the United States in 1923, sold only 2,000 copies in eighteen years. But in later life when Pirandello turned this novel into a play, over 100,000 copies were sold within two years.

During the World War Pirandello secluded himself in an apartment outside Rome and wrote continuously. He saw practically no one. It is said that he was so tortured by the horrors of the war, in which his only son was fighting, that in an effort to help offset his anxiety he began writing for the theatre. Whatever may have been the reason for his turning to the stage so late in life, it is chiefly through this medium that he is known outside his native country.

When Pirandello's plays were first produced, the public, accustomed to the romantic and extravagant dramas of Gabriele D'Annunzio, was bewildered by their seeming obscurity and intellectualized quality. The author was accused of caricaturing life, of creating, instead of living beings, nothing more than marionettes. And it was not until his plays were performed in Rome that the critics discovered their true meaning and significance. From this moment on Pirandello found himself the leading playwright of Italy, and one of the few of the world.

Since 1915 Pirandello has written over half a hundred dramas. In all of them he is likely to raise these questions: (1) The necessity and the vanity of illusion; (2) the multiform appearances, all

of them unreal, of what is presumed to be the truth; (3) man is not what he thinks he is, but he is "one, no one and a hundred thousand," according as he appears to this person or that, and is always different from what he creates himself in his own mind.

It is easy to disagree with Pirandello's conception of the nature of man. It does sound too finely spun. But his plays open up new fields of speculation to all who read them.

In spite of his preoccupation with metaphysical ideas Pirandello's plays have been successfully produced in most of the play-going countries of the world. In them, it is apparent, he evinces no belief in absolute values, but that all things exist only in relation to something else.

So difficult to portray are his dramatic characters, and so much alike are these "grotesque marionettes," that the most expert and intellectualized acting is essential to their adequate presentation. Pirandello realized this and founded, in 1925, his own small *Teatro Odescalci* in Rome. Here his company of skilled performers produce his plays, as well as other new Italian and foreign pieces. The summer the theatre was founded Pirandello took the new company on a tour to London, Paris, Basle and eighteen theatres in Germany. He created a sensation in all of them.

Six Characters in Search of an Author is perhaps Pirandello's best known play, and epitomizes better than any other his philosophy of human personality which runs through all his later writings.

Subjects for Study

1. Pirandello's Tragic Life, and His Art

His sad childhood and unfortunate marriage.

His development from the school of naturalism, and revolt against the art theories of the sensuous, emotional, and poetic D'Annunzio.

It has been said that Italian literature has always sought the grandiose, that it is turgid and hollow, with no interest in ideas or introspection. Others have stressed the realistic traits of the Italian people. In which category would Pirandello fall? Show why.

His dramatic characters the reflection of his own personality. The influence of his personal life on his works.

2. Six Characters in Search of an Author

Theme: What is Pirandello trying to show about the reality of personality? Does he succeed dramatically?

Characters: Do the characters have reality? Which group seems more real—the manager and his professional actors or the Six Characters who wish to find an author to complete them? Is the author regarding his creations emotionally or intellectually?

Structure: This is a play within a play. Notice that the first act gives the background, the second re-enacts the scene between the Father and the Stepdaughter, and the third presents the life of the Six Characters in the home of the Father. Do not let the complexity of plot discourage you. The conception is fairly easy to understand if you will go back to the theme.

Compare this play with *Right You Are!* (*If You Think So*). Read the Second Act.

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CHAPTER XIII

JACINTO BENAVENTE, VERSATILE GENIUS

"I do not make my plays for the public, I make the public for my plays." —BENEVENTE

There is striking similarity in the early careers of Jacinto Benavente and Pirandello. Both were born within a year of each other, both came of well-to-do families, and the same spirit of revolt against old literary forms characterizes them. Neither followed the careers planned for them by their parents, and in later years both were awarded the Nobel Prize in literature.

Benavente's father, an eminent physician, did all he could to make a lawyer out of his son. But he was no sooner dead than Jacinto abandoned his law course at the University of Madrid and joined a circus. As manager he traveled with it through France, Germany and Russia, meeting all classes of people, especially the poor, obscure and unspoiled in whom Benavente delighted. He is said, on occasions, to have performed in the ring. This is probably true, for subsequently he became a good, though not professional actor. Always Benavente has traveled whenever he could, and, as a result, he is familiar with the languages, customs, and literatures of all the countries of western Europe and America. The world is his home.

But while Pirandello, as a young man, expressed impatience, if not scorn for, the theatre, Benavente has loved it from his earliest days. He has written little—a volume of verse and one book of prose—that is not connected with the theatre. And to him more than to any other Spanish writer goes credit for introducing into his country modern drama as we understand it. His plays are concerned with the life of Spain, a subject that had been avoided by his predecessors who were devoted to romance and rhetoric.

Benavente has experimented with almost all forms of dramatic art. Apart from being actor and producer, he has written farce, tragedy, bourgeois drama, trifling skits, elaborate studies of symbolism, libretti for operettas—all he handles with equal mastery. He has translated dramas from many languages, he is a literary critic who writes with the wit and pungency of Bernard Shaw. He is "serenely free" in any style and defies identity with any "school."

He has written as many as 150 plays. They can be classified, roughly, as, (1) airy pieces with a moral; (2) amusing sketches of reality; (3) scenes drawn from the real world with a satirical intent; (4) fantasies that signify symbolically more than appear on the surface; (5) a series of feministic studies exalting the character of women; and (6) an occasional stark presentation of passion. In all these forms he has been imitated by his contemporaries in Spain, but as yet no rival has appeared.

Bonds of Interest, his best-known play in America, is chosen for study. This play has a significance that is not immediately apparent and should be read with this in mind.

Subjects for Study

1. Benavente's Life and Work in the Theatre

His youth.
His love of the theatre. He abandons his law studies.
He casts aside old dramatic forms. Generation of 1898.
Development of motives and action through dialogue of characters.
Love of epigrammatic speech equal to that of Oscar Wilde.
Social significance of his dramas. (He was the first in Spain to satirize upper and middle class society.)

2. Bonds of Interest, a Satirical Comedy

Theme: Is this a satire on the duality of human nature? Read Crispin's speech to Columbine in Act II: "We all have within ourselves. . ." How does this differ from the theme of Stevenson's story, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde?* Do not let the grace and deftness of the play deceive you as to its significance.

Characters: Does the author intend that Leander and Crispin be understood as one unified personality, each a counterpart of the other? What would each typify, if this be the case? Why does Crispin change place with Leander at the end of the comedy?

Structure: To what extent does the effectiveness of this play depend upon the witty, subtle dialogue? Which seems of first importance to the playwright, the plot or the characters? Read the Prologue as spoken by Crispin. Does this sound like Benavente himself talking? Notice there are no descriptions of characters and no scene is set.
How would Pirandello have treated the same idea?
Compare with *His Widow's Husband.*

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CHAPTER XIV

MAXIM GORKY, FRIEND OF THE OUTCAST

"I felt the lure of the Volga, and the music of a life of toil. . ." —GORKY

It was not by chance that young Alexei Maximovitch Peshkov chose the word Gorky as his pen name. It is derived from the Russian word "gor'kii," and means "the bitter one."

His family was of that lower middle-class in Russia where wife-beating was the chief emotional outlet of jaundiced husbands and child-flogging a Saturday night routine. By these cruelties Alexei's gentle and loving nature was constantly outraged. His father died when the boy was four years old and he was brought to live with his maternal grandparents. From his grandfather's hand he received his first beating. It was Saturday night, and, says he, "grandfather flogged me till I lost consciousness, and I was unwell for some days, tossing about, face downwards on a wide, stuffy bed, in a little room with one window and a lamp which was always kept burning before the case of icons in the corner. Those dark days had been the greatest in my life. . ." Alexei was not yet five years old and while his body healed his heart carried the scars to his last day.

But not all was darkness in the young child's life. He had his beloved grandmother. It was she who made life endurable for him, and his lonely heart went out to her with pathetic eagerness. "Before she came into my life," writes Gorky after he had become a well-known writer, "I seemed to have been asleep, tucked away in darkness. Then she appeared, woke me up, led me into the light of day, linked my surroundings with a continuous thread, wove them into a many-colored lace work, and made herself my friend for life, the nearest, most understanding, and dearest being. Her disinterested love for the world enriched me and saturated me with stout fortitude for a hard life."

Certainly Alexei needed fortitude for the days that were to come. Living with his grandparents in a two-room dark cellar with only poverty and brutality as companions, the boy was forced to gather bits of iron in the streets, stray pieces of lumber, and rags and old papers wherever he could find them. For he could sell these and procure a few kopecks to eke out a painful existence. His schoolmates called him "the rag picker" and would not sit near him

because, they said, he "smelled badly." This last Alexei denied. He went to school his whole life for only a few months, and meeting so much unkindness, he hated it. Later in life he tried to enter the University at Kazan but was bitterly unsuccessful. His university was destined to be that of experience, and in his case, the courses were hard and well learned.

When he was nine years old his mother died and his grandfather informed him that henceforth he would have to take care of himself. So Alexei wandered about for the next fifteen years, picking up jobs wherever he could find them. He was, at various times, a cobbler's apprentice, an errand boy, dishwasher on a Volga steamer, clerk to a lawyer, draftsman's assistant, and a tramp. When he was nineteen he tried to kill himself. During this time he had discovered books and read until his eyes temporarily gave way. Then in his twenties he began to write short stories of what he had seen and done, and before he was thirty he was writing plays and novels.

How it is that a boy with such inauspicious beginnings should have become one of the great literary figures of the world? It seems almost foreordained.

The Lower Depths has done most to give Gorky his reputation in America as a dramatist. Gorky said that he considers *The Judge* "rather more interesting than any other I have written." The great writer, honored artist of the Soviet Republic, died in Moscow June 18, 1936, of influenza. He had suffered from tuberculosis most of his life.

Subjects for Study

1. Gorky's Life and Its Relation to His Writings

His beginning—mother and father.
The Kashirins.
At the "University" at Kazan.
From tramp to writer. Tolstoy and Chekhov and their influence on him.
The Revolutionary turmoil, prison, and his final exile. Recent years.

2. The Lower Depths as a Play of Naturalism

Theme: It is difficult to ascribe a definite theme. It is rather an exposition of the thoughts and motives of a group of society's outcasts.

Characters: Luka, with his love of theorizing, stands as a contrast to all the other characters. Is his influence entirely beneficent? Notice there isn't a single subsidiary character. The contrast between what these

people are and what they were, or might have been, is the essence of this drama. Notice that each character is the protagonist of his own drama, that their dramas parallel but are never coincident.

Structure: Gorky has been accused of being ignorant of dramatic craftsmanship. Does this play seem poorly designed? or does its "flowing and wavering" technique seem to spring from a juster insight into human life? There is little development of plot according to the best traditional dramatic rules, though the climax occurs at the usually expected place. Some have called this play gloomy, if not sordid. What is your judgment? Read Act II.

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CHAPTER XV

ANTON CHEKHOV, RECORDER OF LOST ILLUSIONS

"My soul longs for breadth and altitude. . ."

—CHEKHOV

"Every time I see a play by Chekhov, I want to chuck all my own stuff into the fire," said Bernard Shaw. Yet Constantin Stanislavsky, the great Russian actor and friend of Chekhov, writes that the author of *The Cherry Orchard* "was very proud of his medical calling, more than of his talent as a writer." Chekhov himself in a letter to a friend wrote, "Medicine is my lawful wife, while literature is my mistress." But it is as a writer rather than a physician that Chekhov achieved greatness.

Like Gorky, Chekhov was of humble origin. In 1841, nineteen years before his birth, a serf belonging to a Russian nobleman was given his freedom along with his wife and children for 3,500 roubles. This man was Anton Chekhov's grandfather, and one of these children was his own father, born a slave.

Anton was one of six children, and while they were young his father owned a grocery store and managed to feed and clothe them in comfort. But his passion for violin playing and choir singing caused him to neglect his business and before many years the family was destitute, and Anton had to earn his own living though still a youth. Chekhov has said that he inherited his talents from his father, but from his mother he got his soul. Certainly he came by a full share of both, for with all his genius he was always gentle and understanding.

Chekhov wanted to study medicine at the University of Moscow but there was no money to pay for the course. He would not allow circumstances to turn him from his ambition, however, and in 1897 he entered the medical school there. He had his M.D. degree five years later, and during this time he had supported not only himself but his family also. How had he done this? By writing short stories and sketches for the magazines. This, along with his studies, must have been too great a strain, for he discovered, the year he took his degree, that he was a victim of tuberculosis, a disease that plagued him until his death at the age of forty-four. He never ceased working, however. He wrote what is generally con-

sidered his greatest play, *The Cherry Orchard,* the last year of his life, and it was produced by the Moscow Art Theatre only a short time before his death.

It seems quite by accident that Chekhov became a dramatist. In September, 1887, he wrote to a friend: "I was twice in Korsh's Theatre, and both times Korsh begged me to write a play. I answered, 'With pleasure!' The actors assured me that I shall write a good drama, since I know how to play on the nerves. I answered 'Merci', and of course I will not write a play. I have absolutely no interest in the theatre. . ." However, being in need of money, he did write a play, a four-act comedy entitled *Ivanov.* It was a great success, although it was declared "bold, cynical, immoral, and disgusting." Chekhov was encouraged by this unexpected success, and thus began his career as a dramatist. During the next seventeen years of his life he wrote fourteen plays, five of which were full-length and are well-known in America.

Chekhov was the Moscow Art Theatre's first love. It has been questioned whether either could have achieved so much without the other. The Art Theatre depended upon him to furnish them its best dramas, and he, in turn, looked to the Art Theatre to give his plays the restrained and imaginative interpretation they had to have.

Chekhov's plays are tightly woven and carefully designed. His technique is not obvious, there are no "prepared climaxes"; the characters seem quiet and casual, and the situations are of the most usual sort. Where, then, lies the explanation of his dramatic genius?

Subjects for Study

1. Anton Chekhov and His Plays

His mother and father, brothers, and sister. Their home life.
His struggles for an education.
His gaiety and love of people. He said: "I positively can't live without visitors."
He buys a country "estate" and brings his mother and father to live with him. The farm, and his work as country physician, author, and gardener
The Moscow Art Theatre. Stanislavsky. Olga Knipper.
His marriage in 1901. His death in July, 1904.
Something about his writings.

2. The Three Sisters

Theme: Many people would ascribe many themes to this play. Some might say its theme is "the sadness of life." Others might say it is "the need of faith and hard work." It is possible that both would be wrong. What is your idea?

Characters: There is no central figure. While the portraits are drawn without exaggeration there is clear distinction between them. Olga is patient, Masha is rebellious, Irina, irresolute, while Andrei is simply mediocre, and dominated by his coarse and commonplace wife. Do you think Kuligin is really blind to his wife's feeling toward him? Notice the restrained treatment of the scenes between Masha and Vershinin, especially in Act III, when Masha hums a little tune—"Trum-tum-tum. . ." and Vershinin answers, "Tum-tum. . ." Does it seem to you that the characters want to find a "meaning" of life, and failing, have resigned themselves to an insane idealism?

Structure: Chekhov pays no attention to the dictum, "Make everything further the main action." There is not, strictly speaking, a plot. Here is rather a middle-class family and its friends revealed before us, and their absolute inability to cope with life, except, perhaps, the parvenu, Natasha. Read Act III.

3. The Cherry Orchard

Theme: The theme of this play is very apparent. Compare it with the theme of Paul Green's play, *The House of Connelly.*

Characters: The characters consist of more varied types than those in *The Three Sisters.* They are easier to classify than in the former play. Some are coarse and sentimental, others are shallow and weak. The house and orchard seem just as much living things as the people themselves. Notice how the characters talk at cross purposes. Is their misfortune a result of outward circumstances or of their own lives?

Structure: Would you call this a "well-made" play according to the French tradition? The only "action" is the auction sale which takes place off the stage. Notice that there is not a series of climaxes. What is important is "the even flow of life revealed as the majority must live it." What action there is springs from the characters themselves, rather than from outside circumstances. "What Chekhov desired," says Oliver Sayler, "was to interpret life through its reticences, its nuances, its slender moments." Do you think this is an accurate judgment? What is the social significance of *The Cherry Orchard?*

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3. *Desire Under the Elms*

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Date.....

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2. *Both Your Houses.*

Third Meeting: Paul Green, Fearless Artist Date.....

1. Paul Green's Life and Writings
2. *In Abraham's Bosom*
3. *The House of Connelly*

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Date.....

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